



Illustration by
Floyd M. Davis

A fist landed squarely between the creature's already blinded eyes

The Sharpshooter

by IRVIN S. COBB

IT WAS early in June that Todd Harper came back, full of the West and the Western people, from his first trip to the West. Particularly he was full of talk about Jess Rossiter. He had met this Mr. Rossiter in Butte, where that gentleman lived, and had spent a couple of weeks at his new friend's ranch in Flathead Valley. Running a ranch was a sort of game with Mr. Rossiter, as Todd explained to his fiancée, Patricia Stoddard. Mr. Rossiter's business was mining engineering.

"You're going to like Jess, Pat," he said repeatedly. "He's so dog-gone honest — so competent and unassuming. He never puts on airs, doesn't have to. Just take one look at him, and you know that here's a fellow that knows his stuff from the ground up."

"Since you've grown so fond of him on such short acquaintance, he must be all you say," she agreed with him the first time he said this. "But, Toddy, are you sure that when he visits you, he's going to fit in with the crowd we run with?"

"Don't you worry about Jess not fitting in," proclaimed Todd. "Wait till you see him."

Now Pat had been to Europe several times and once to Egypt, but she had never been west of the more westerly suburbs of Chicago. In her mind, the residents of the Far West, so called, were associated with two words — "picturesque" and "breezy." So when Mr. Rossiter came on in July, and she motored from Amagansett with Todd to greet him, she expected to meet what privately she had been picturing as "one of those picturesque, breezy western types."

There she was disappointed. The middle-sized person who came through the train gates

at the Grand Central to be enthusiastically welcomed by Todd and by him presented to her had a distinctive manner, but it certainly was not picturesque nor was it breezy. For one thing, he was quietly dressed in garments which fitted him and into which he fitted. For another thing, his manner was simple and unaffected. He didn't have a great deal to say. His smile wasn't bad; his way of crinkling the corners of his eyes was distinctly good. His complexion was a tanned reddish. Keen winds had helped to etch it, and strong suns had fixed the pigments.

The three of them rode back together to Amagansett. Pat got out at the Stoddard cottage on the dunes just beyond the village. The two men drove on half a mile further to the Harper house. They were to meet again that night for dinner at the Rutgers', who were neighbors.

The Montana man turned up, groomed and smart in a dinner-jacket which neither was too snug nor too loose and in faultless white flannel trousers. Against the well-baked red of his neck, his white collar looked whiter than any collar, however well starched, has any right to look. Among these people he was at ease.

Old Mr. Rutgers, their host, appeared to take an immediate liking to the westerner. Before the first round of cocktails, he was deep in talk with Rossiter. The old gentleman had mining interests in Colorado and Arizona. After his second cocktail he was openly proclaiming that this fellow from Butte had made a hit with him. It seemed also that Rossiter was making a hit in other quarters. Undeniably his wit, his drawl, his ability as a story teller — all appealed to people.

After dinner, Todd drew his sweetheart aside. "Well," he asked, "what do you think of him?"

"I suppose he'll do," she said.

His face fell. "Why, what's wrong? Don't you like him?"

"There's one thing about him that I don't care for."

"What's that?" His manner was defensive, almost aggrieved.

"Why must he do that?"

"Do what?"

"What he's doing. You must have noticed it before now."

Todd looked where she glanced. His friend's lean jaws worked steadily, methodically, as he listened to what his host was telling him. Todd's eyebrows went up combatively. He was mad.

"So that's the trouble, huh?" he said. "Anything else wrong with him that you can think of offhand?"

"Don't take that tone, please. Isn't that enough? He was chewing away when he got off the train. Most of the way coming down in the car he was still chewing that terrible stuff. And now he's at it again. For a man in company and strange company at that — well!"

Todd opened his mouth to explain, closed it with a snap. Explaining might make things worse; besides, his friend needed no explaining to anyone. He said stiffly:

"You don't understand." Todd was striving to keep his mounting temper under control. "Jess has lived in a desert country and out there, when sometimes for long stretches there isn't any water fit to drink, men get in the habit of chewing on something — a scrap of raw-

hide, even. It keeps down thirst, you know," he added painstakingly.

"Then he should stay where his talents would be appreciated."

"Look here, Pat, you shouldn't say that." It was evident that Todd was hurt.

"Why shouldn't I say it? From a gentleman one expects certain things."

Todd stiffened. "Jess Rossiter is one of the finest gentlemen I ever knew. What's more, he's my friend, and as the girl I'm going to marry inside of three months, I expect you to treat him as my friend."

"But Todd, couldn't you speak to him? Couldn't you tell him that it — what he does — isn't being done in polite society?"

"Certainly I'll not speak to him. He'd tell me to mind my own business — and I wouldn't blame him either."

"Are you afraid of him?"

"If you dare intimate anything like that, I'll — say, Pat," he demanded rudely, "are you going to let this thing drop where it is, or aren't you?"

Between them and very swiftly, they had brewed up the makings of a first-rate quarrel. Pat's brown eyes were shooting sparks; Todd was getting pale around the gills. Suddenly the girl felt remorse.

"Oh, Toddy, let's not fuss," she said. "After all, it's such a little thing. I'll be nice to him."

She was very sweet and lovely, and he was human and very much in love with her, so presently after he had growled a little more, which was manlike, and she had snuggled against him, which was womanlike, the breach was healed.

That is, outwardly it was healed. But it was plain to her that within him the sore spot rankled, and equally plain to him that, perhaps against her will, she still maintained her prejudices for his guest.

Privately, Pat reproached herself that no matter where her eyes or her thoughts might stray when she was in Rossiter's company, sooner or later both thoughts and eyes would come back with little fastidious revulsions to a covert attention of his munching jaws. Small as it was, the thing got to be an obsession with her. It was in a fair way to spoil this part of her summer for her; indeed it was spoiling it. In it there even was danger for her romance with Todd.

Tentatively the date for the wedding had been fixed, but, for reasons growing out of smaller causes than this, weddings before now have been postponed or annulled.

Todd insisted that during the ten days of his stay, Rossiter should be his constant companion, which meant that unless there was some girl for him to squire, Rossiter went along as a third wheel for the cart wherever the engaged pair went — to bathing parties and dinner parties, to dances and golf, and all the rest of the round of summer activities in the nearby colonies along the South Shore. And Todd stepped out of his way to be attentive to Rossiter. Pat felt as though she were being pushed aside, and on these feelings her own resentment fed.

From one reflection she presently took comfort: This was Tuesday, and since Rossiter would be leaving on Thursday, she would have to endure him for only a little while longer.

Wednesday evening there was to be a dinner party at the Marchmonts' up in Smithtown. Rossiter in the rôle of an unattached stag went along with Todd and Pat in Todd's car. To reach Smithtown in time, the three of them had to start out early, the men wearing light top coats over their dinner-jackets, and Pat with a wrap for her bared shoulders.

From Hampton Bays they slanted across the Island to the North Shore. After they passed Riverhead, Todd turned off the state highway into a crooked by-lane which, so he thought, furnished a short cut to the Middle Country Road running east and west somewhere back of Yaphank.

Almost immediately they were winding at reduced speed through dense coverts of scrub-

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A Canary Choir — and Circus

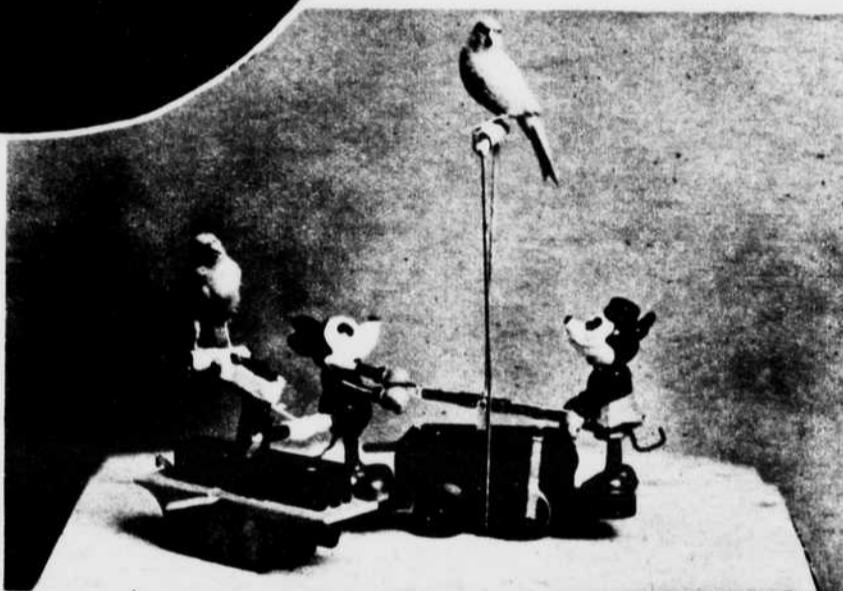
by PEGGY VON DER GOLTZ



Miss Hayes and two of her performers

WHITE WINGS is a small, plain, yellow canary, undistinguished in appearance; but he is worth his weight in gold. When he hops on his mistress' hand, cocks a bright, black eye at an admiring world, and whistles "Yankee Doodle" in a sweet, precise little voice you understand why he is so precious.

White Wings' mistress, Miss Lillian Hayes, of Dunreith, Indiana, has been breeding and training canaries



Canary stars of music and the circus ring



"My Old Kentucky Home," thus making a medley. He celebrated his third birthday on May 25th.

"Caruso," about a year old now, is another star performer. He whistles "Yankee Doodle" so softly and sweetly that one would almost believe he was whistling a sacred number; and he drops from one note to the other in true operatic grace.

"Buddy" has been two years before the public and he likes his audiences to be large. He whistles better when plenty of folks crowd around him. The more they laugh the more he whistles; sometimes he'll repeat verse and chorus a dozen times (it depends upon how well pleased his audience is) and if there are no cheers he gives his own "Hip, hip, hooray."

Female canaries rarely sing, and, when they do, they do not sing as well

as males. But Miss Hayes has found them smarter, so she trained a canary circus. Its outstanding performer is a self-possessed bird named Emma. Emma is a dauntless soul, not intimidated by man or beast, or two-hundred-pound photographers. She and the other circus performers ride toy tricycles, walk a tight rope, climb a winding stairs, swing on a trapeze, perform other clever tricks and accept the praise that comes their way as their just due. Two of the birds "work on the railroad," riding a miniature hand car round and round the track.

There is no magic in canary training, Miss Hayes insists. First, be sure your bird likes you, for if he doesn't all your efforts will be wasted. See that his physical needs are attended to; and take care that he isn't thwarted in love, for a lovelorn bird won't sing.

Miss Hayes starts training the birds as soon as they can hear, and that's pretty early in life. It took her seven months to train her first birds to whistle a tune, but now the young birds hear their parents whistling, which makes training easier for the birds — and the teacher. Last year she raised forty-five young and every one whistled "Yankee Doodle" at eight or ten weeks.

But, without the aid of the parents, it takes a lot of patience and understanding.

Miss Hayes attributes much of her success to her skill in matching the tune to the bird. You can't teach just any tune to just any canary, she says; you must consider the pitch and range of his voice, and the rhythm of his natural song.

"Yankee Doodle" is a rollicking tune and well suited to the birds' vocal capacity, says Miss Hayes; but some birds in her troupe sing other songs. One ambitious youngster attempted "The Rosary," but he couldn't whistle it all the way through — the half tones were too much for him.

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oak and scrub-pine. The familiar Long Island of smart villages and millionaires' estates and ambitious real-estate developments suddenly was extinguished behind them. They passed a section of somebody's high-fenced hunting preserve, passed a few scattered small homesteads, then for a longish stretch nothing was to be seen ahead or on either flank excepting trees and thickets touched on their off-sides with the slanting sun-rays.

"I never suspected you had a regular wilderness this close to New York City," remarked Rossiter.

"I knew this woodland was here," said Todd, "but I didn't know there was so much of it. Or so few signs of human life. We haven't met anybody since that last little farmhouse."

Just then they rounded a sharp turn and came upon a fellow traveler, who seemed to be in difficulties. A small smart-looking two-seater was drawn up at the side of the road. A well-dressed young man sat on the inner running-board of his car. He was hunched down in a posture suggesting weakness. His head was down, his neck sagging. His hands dangled in his lap. His hat was off and lying in a sandy rut. As they neared him, their own car slowing down, the slumped figure stirred but did not straighten. One arm, raised as if with an effort, was waved in a gesture that carried an appeal.

"We'd better stop," said Todd.

He steered wide of the halted car and brought his machine to a standstill a few rods on beyond. As he and Rossiter got out, Pat said:

"Wait, I'm coming too. He looks sick — terribly sick."

"Struck me the same way," Rossiter said.

At their hurried approach the huddled shape on the running-board did not move.

"What's the matter, old chap?" asked Todd.

Not changing his position, the stranger muttered words. They caught some of them — "dizziness all of a sudden . . . had to stop . . . here a long while."

"Poor fellow," murmured Pat.

"Here, Jess," volunteered Todd, "let's get him on his pins."

The two men moved closer with intent to take the sufferer by the arms and raise him, Pat advancing with them.

The lolled head snapped erect, the transformed figure sprang upright, and the stranger was alertly on his feet and in command of the situation, holding them under the foreshortened muzzle of an automatic pistol which shifted from left to right and back again.

"Stick 'em up, friends," he bade the astounded trio with a sort of fevered and ferocious gayety. "And keep 'em up."

Never before having heard that command given, Pat nevertheless instantly obeyed it. As her opened palms lifted past the level of her ears, her fascinated stare fixed on the daunting armed apparition before her, Pat was somehow aware that her companions were doing the same thing, their hands going aloft jerkily, as hers did, but going.

"Good!" the stranger exulted. "Now get this: Step off into them bushes behind you and keep stepping until I give the word. Never mind turning round to see which way you're going. Keep your lamps on me. I'll steer you with this." With his pistol barrel he made a darting motion.

Afterwards Pat, for one, was able to recreate from her consciousness separate items of recollection. She was able to remember how briars tore at her stockings and stung at her ankles;

how she bumped into tree boles and stumblingly angled clear of them; how she and Todd and Rossiter backed and backed until by direction from their master, he shepherding them along like the vigilant drill-master of an awkward squad, they brought up in a small glade that was hidden from the road.

While it was all happening, though, her whole being was concentrated in an orbit of horror and apprehension upon their captor. Her eyes told her that she had fallen into the hands of a creature in whom all imaginable craft and cruelty was summed up. In his triumph he radiated a malignancy, a capacity for inflicting nameless indignities, if so minded, which even in that moment she told herself would be no part of an ordinary bandit. It was as though he swam at them through a film of his own distilled viciousness.

It was not so much the gloating play across his pasty-white face with the slick unwholesome patina upon it that betokened a drug-fiend, nor the eyes that glared at them with so venomous an intensity, nor the baleful foppishness of his flashy garments, as though a butcher had put on his Sunday best for slaughter-house work — it was not any one of these things but rather all of them plus an almost visible emanation which made him the composite of evil and degeneracy.

And here now the helpless three of them stood abreast under the hypnotizing spells of his weapon and of his dreadful sinister personality — these three who less than five minutes before had been detouring along through a peaceful country road bound for a smart dinner party.

The hold-up man's next words were addressed to the girl.

"Slide out of that cloak of yours," he ordered. "Make it snappy, Frail."

She minded him. The loose, deep-

cuffed garment fell to the earth revealing that her wrists and her throat were jeweled. She had on a necklace of pearls, a diamond-mounted wrist-watch, and a broad emerald and diamond bracelet that had been an engagement present from Todd. She had on also the ring he had given her.

But it was not on these valuables that the man's eyes rested now. True, his look shifted from one bright bauble to another, but at once it rested on her body — upon her slim ankles below the hem of her skirt, upon her bare shoulders, her bare arms. She had the feeling of a naked white slave in a black man's market place. And a deeper, more saturating terror than that which she had known in the preceding moments possessed her.

There was no need that he should put into speech his new intent. It was exactly as though this human asp said to her:

"This is a richer prospect than I had hoped for. First I'll get rid of your two young men. Then —"

She wanted to scream out — and didn't dare. She wanted to plead with him — and couldn't. A single outcry from her, a single attempt at resistance by either of her companions, and the work of killing would be precipitated — of that intuitively she was certain.

And then, all at once, the wretch began to chuckle. He was enjoying the expression on Rossiter's face. As he evidently interpreted it, fear was turning Rossiter's face into a comic mask. Rossiter's cheeks were sucked in until the jawbones showed through the shrunken skin, and Rossiter's lips were pursing up in a curious pucker, and Rossiter's eyes were squinting up as though Rossiter might be getting ready to burst into tears.

It was such a good joke that he had to laugh out. He did, loudly. And

his laugh ended in an agonized howl.

The pistol, fired without aim, barked once, twice, its bullets going wild and harming no one. Then Todd leaped forward to do his share. His athletic body flew across the intervening space, and both his fists landed, one on the point of the jaw, the other squarely between the enemy's blinded eyes, where it made the moist smearing which had suddenly appeared there spatter out in a kind of amber-colored asterisk.

Pat felt her knees giving way under her and sat down on the grass, for the first time in her healthy young life half fainting away. What brought her back to actualities was a remark uttered in an almost casual tone by that blessed marksman from Butte.

He and Todd had the wriggling, screeching footpad down, face to the ground. Chewing away blithely, he knelt on their prisoner's heaving shoulders while Todd, having knotted two handkerchiefs and a cravat together into a serviceable rope, was grappling with the prisoner's threshing arms in an endeavor to pinion his wrists behind his back.

"Wait a minute, old man, till I turn him over," the victorious sharpshooter was saying. "It'll be only kindness to tie his hands in front of him — so he can reach up and claw at his eyes once in a while. You'd be astonished how that stuff burns when it lands in your eyes," said Rossiter, still chewing away.

So at that Pat got up, very shaky, from where she had dropped, and she bided her chance until the struggle was ended, and then she somewhat hysterically kissed Todd and after that she kissed Rossiter, not on the cheek but full on the lips and, so doing, caught a pronouncedly nicotinish smell. For the moment at least, it seemed to her the grandest smell she'd ever smelled in her entire life.